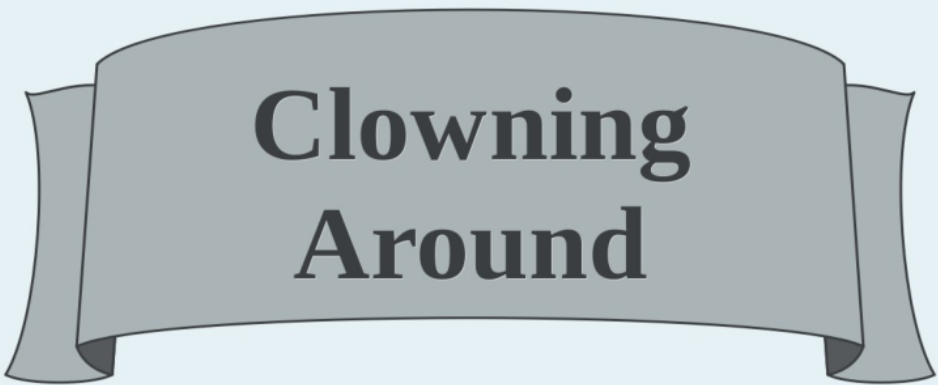




Clowning Around

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narch**

Clowning Around by theonetheonlyalexthemonarch

Category: IT (2017)

Genre: Creepy, Dark Comedy, Jealousy, Other, Surreal, Violence, based on a vastly superior work by commala, characters are sorta ooc sometimes sorry i'm too lazy to fix it, i wrote this out of order and its not really chronological and you can totally tell, it doesn't really make any sense, just like, shoved together, there's a lot of poetry bc i'm pretentious as shit, this is a bunch of dreams i had, uhh, very brief reference to the dark tower

Language: English

Characters: Pennywise (IT), Reader

Relationships: Pennywise (IT)/Reader

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Summary:

You've been having strange dreams lately.

1. Poe

Author's Note:

- For .
- Inspired by [City Hall](#) by [orphan_account](#).

So after I read City Hall by Commala, which is much much better than this, I started to have weird dreams. In these dreams, the themes are represented by two separate yet equally important genres: horror, which I love for the chills it sends down my spine, and comedy, which I love cause it's fuckin stupid. These are the stories.

There's a lot of poetry references because I'm a pretentious piece of shit and the reader is nonbinary because these are my dreams and this is a poorly disguised self insert, but don't worry if you're not, I only explicitly mention it twice.

I think that's all. And just one more time, everyone should read City Hall by Commala. It was great and better than this, but in the mean time, enjoy!

The bells tolled and you were nervous.

You weren't sure why. But every time the bell rang, dread shot up your spine.

You blamed Poe. Oh, you loved him, to be sure, but you were also absolutely certain that somewhere in the real world, you were collapsed with a copy of *The Complete Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe* on your face open to the poem "The Bells."

You weren't that worried. Dreams after reading poetry were always weird but ultimately harmless. Might as well just roll with the punches. After all, what could possibly go wrong? It was only a circus.

But how do you know it's a circus , the annoying Anxiety Voice inside you asked. You've never been to a circus in your life. You've only ever been to carnivals. You should be calling it a carnival given your past experiences because if you were plopped down in a circus without knowing what it was, your initial reaction would be to call it a carnival because that's the only thing you could compare it to. But you're calling this a circus. Why? Seems fishy to me.

"K, but literally everything seems fishy to you," you muttered to the voice under your breath.

It's all a conspiracy. This isn't your subconscious at all. You're in some sinister world that's implanting the idea of what it is into your brain. In a few minutes, you will be functionally brain dead and a slave to this strange, new, sentient world.

"Uh huh, that's nice," you said to yourself, wandering into a tent. Intrusive thoughts were easy to deal with if you treated them like some crackpot conspiracy theorist.

The tent was dark for some reason. But you could hear life and movement and warmth from right outside, so you weren't that concerned. The dark was actually a welcome relief from the bright lights outside. The sounds were muffled and you instantly felt less irritable. It was nice.

The bells tolled and the warmth of the circus melted off of you. You were suddenly very cold, the dread having sunk deep into your bones this time.

“Keeping time, time, time,” you muttered. You actually really wished you had your Poe poems right about now. Sure, “The Bells” was essentially a panic attack on paper, but the rhythm was so soothing and the words felt nice in your mouth. It really would make you feel better if you could recite it, but you didn’t have it memorized. You could always do another one, they pretty much all had perfect rhythm. You weren’t quite sure which to do though.

Suddenly, a spotlight turned on in the center of the tent and you yelped in surprise. You blinked, trying to adjust to the sudden change in light. In the center of the spotlight, there was a dramatically posed... clown?

“Lo!” It cried, making you jump in surprise. “ ‘Tis a gala night within the lonesome latter years! An angel throng, bewinged, bedight in veils, and drowned in tears... ”

Oh, you thought. It’s doing “The Conqueror Worm.” That’s a weird coincidence.

In all honesty, the whole act was weird. Something about it unsettled you, and you couldn’t really see anyone else inside the tent besides you and the clown, and that was kinda creepy.

You watched for a bit. You didn’t want to seem rude by leaving in the middle of an act, but...

“ ... And much of Madness, and more of Sin, and Horror the soul of the plot.”

Oh, you might as well stay. It was getting to your favorite part. Besides, you did want to listen to the rhythm to calm down, it might help.

The clown paused for a moment and looked right at you. It didn't say anything and grinned viciously.

Well, that was ominous.

“But see, amid the mimic rout, a crawling shape intrude!” It said, starting again. Was it just you or had his voice gotten deeper at the end?

“A blood-red thing that writhes from out the scenic solitude!” Okay, the clown's voice was definitely deeper than before and it looked just a little bit taller. And maybe pinker? Fuck, if this was some creepy magic trick where they turn the clown into a massive fucking worm, you were so out.

“It writhes!—” Its head snapped to the side at an unnatural angle.

“It writhes!—” You heard every bone in the clown's back pop as it extended literally twelve feet in a half a second. Oh no. This whole

whatever the fuck can go fuck itself, you were Audi.

You turned to leave and you had to stumble back before a blood-red tail nearly crushed you, effectively blocking your exit.

Fuck, you thought. This wasn't supposed to happen. This is a poetry dream. This wasn't supposed to happen.

But it did. And now you were trapped with one of your worst nightmares and you couldn't leave. There was only one way to go and that was back and you absolutely didn't want to turn and see the *actual Conqueror Worm, metaphor for existentialism and death and the futility of human life* given tangible form.

It looked like you weren't going to be given a choice as the tail that almost squashed you like a bug began to wrap around you. It was almost as thick as you were tall and began to roll you up to turn you to face the cl— *It* . To turn you to face It.

Because It wasn't a clown. Not any more. Its body was red and snakelike and it thrashed around and as you brought your gaze up, up, up Its body to Its head— or lack thereof. It didn't have a head, It had a mouth, a giant circular lamprey mouth with rows and rows and rows of teeth, as far back as you could see, waiting to devour you.

It was the Conqueror Worm. It would end humanity and It would certainly end you, right now. It would eat you, right this moment because—

“With mortal pangs, the mimes become its food.” Its voice was unrecognizable. It was almost too deep for you to register but moving at a frequency that you could feel in your bones. The sound came from deep within It, no, from It, from Its whole writhing body, the noise poured from every inch of Its skin, coming from Something inside.

It paused and you got the feeling that It was watching you. You sobbed. You were so goddamn scared.

“Do you know the next part?” It was asking you if you knew the next part of the poem, the next part of this encounter, what would happen to you after he was done with his sick recitation. You shook with fear and sobs but nodded your head. You knew what would happen next. It would finish the stanza and then— and then—

“And Seraphs sob at vermin fangs in human gore imbued.”

There was one more stanza, but you knew you weren’t going to make it. The mouth got closer, ready to devour you.

You awoke to darkness— (“Out— out are the lights— out all!”) seated at your desk with a blanket over your body (“And, over each quivering form/The curtain, a funeral pall,”). You sat up, letting it slip from your shoulders— (“Falls with the rush of a storm,”) and touched your face. It was covered in sweat and tears and felt cold and clammy (“While the angels, all pallid and wan,”). You stood up. The blanket fell off all the way (“Uprising, unveiling, affirm,”)

It was just a nightmare on the human condition, that’s all. Just a

commentary on Humankind, you thought to yourself— (“That the play is the tragedy ‘Man,’

And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.”).

2. Introductions

“Okay, seriously, what the fuck.”

The clown in front of you blinked innocently.

“Oh, don’t look at me like that, you piece of shit,” you said, not buying the act for a second. “Over the past three days, I’ve had the worst nightmares of my life and in the first one, you were there and you turned into the *fucking Conqueror Worm*, so I’m assuming that you’re behind all this bullshit.”

It widened Its blue eyes as if to say *who, me ?*

“Can it,” you said, your patience quickly running out. “I don’t know who the hell you think you are or how this is even possible, but—”

“Pennywise,” It said.

“I— what?”

“I,” It paused and giggled somewhat manically, “am Pennywise. The *Dancing Clown*. At least, that’s who I *think* I am.”

“...Great for you,” you said, slightly wary. “But anyway, I expect some answers here. What the actual fuck is going on? Why do you

keep showing up in my dreams? And if it's not too much to ask, would you kindly *fuck off* ?”

It grinned wider, teeth sharpening and elongating, face becoming more deformed, eyes turning yellow. It grew taller and began to step toward you at an awkward, limping pace.

“So that's a ‘no?’”

It stopped. Its face returned to the normal clown form.

“What?”

“That's a ‘no, I won't fuck off,’ right?”

It looked bewildered. “No?”

You sighed in frustration, partially at the clown and partially at the ambiguity of language.

“So, just to clarify: does that mean, ‘no, you were incorrect in your original assumption, I didn't mean to say that I wouldn't fuck off and I will in fact do that shortly,’ or ‘no, I won't fuck off, so yes, you were correct in your initial assumption?’”

“Err,” said the clown (should you be calling It Pennywise? Nah, that was a fucking stupid name). “The latter.”

“Okay, thank you. I’m glad we clarified this. Now that I know your main intention is to stick around and, presumably, give me nightmares, I’m also going to assume you won’t answer my other questions, so further dialogue is pointless and I shouldn’t even attempt it.”

It appeared to be taken by surprise. But soon, the toothy grin was back and It walked toward you in a way that you guessed was supposed to be menacing.

“This is happening because it must,” It said, drooling. “It is—”

“Aah fuck,” you interrupted. “Is this some destiny shit? Does this mean destiny is real? Goddamn, I owe someone twenty bucks now. Fuck.” You sighed. Damn, you really thought you were right about the destiny thing.

“Okay, thanks. Good to know.” You wrung your hands a bit. “Right, well, I guess I’ll be seeing you around. Bye.”

You were about to turn and walk away, when—

“That’s it? You’re leaving?” It asked, apparently too shocked to stop you. You weren’t about to let that change.

“Yup,” you said. “Peace.”

You finished turning and left, leaving It stunned into silence.

3. Fanta, Swords, and Starfleet

You had done it. You couldn't believe it. You stared blankly at Its headless body, still standing, swaying slightly. Your eyes were bulging out of your head in shock and you gripped the two liter bottle of fanta tighter. This was easily the coolest thing you had ever done, and it was a dream. It probably wasn't even real.

You looked hot as hell in an old Starfleet uniform, you had an absurd amount of fanta, and you had just decapitated *Pennywise the Clown with a gigantic motherfucking sword* .

You let your eyes slide down to the head on the ground in front of you. To be honest, you weren't quite sure what to do next. What was the etiquette for after you had just decapitated someone? Did you keep Its head? Did you leave it there? Put it on a pike? Shove over the body that was somehow still standing?

You made eye contact with the head. One of Its eyes twitched.

Shit. Disembodied heads didn't usually do that, did they?

Oh fuck, you thought as Its face split open into an animalistic grin and began to vibrate. *Oh balls. Oh I done fucked up this time.*

As you watched, horrified and unable to look away, the ruffles around Its neck began to bend at a uniform place all around Its head. The ends started to split off in twitchy, jerking movements, all the way up to Its face. They became rounded and three dimensional and

— *of fucking hell jesus shit they were turning into thousands of tiny baby arms to hold Its head up .*

Well. This was certainly a Development.

The arms adjusted the head so that it was looking straight at you with vicious, terrible, angry eyes. Eyes that seemed to say, *you better fucking run, bitch.*

“A-actually,” you said, slightly paranoid that It was communicating with you telepathically. “Mu- much like you, I-I-I don’t r-really have an eas-easily defined c-c-c-concept of g-gender.”

Its head tilted back and Its face began to split open at the seems, Its jaw unhinging and the arms shifting to more adequately accommodate the new shape of Its face.

“Right,” you squeaked. “So sorry. Running now.”

You turned around and, holding on to your fanta and sword for dear life, you ran as fast as you could, hearing the faint scuttle of *hecking baby arms what the actual fuck* coming after you at top speed.

4. Aesthetic

You were in your old high school. Everyone was staring at you. They fell silent as you walked by and began to whisper.

“Oh come on,” you said to It, loudly. You were sure It was around here somewhere. “Booooring. You think this is scary? I deal with this shit every day of my adult life. I don’t respect these piece of shit high schoolers and their fucking dumb politics.”

The people started to laugh at you quietly. Then they got louder. And louder. And—

“Yeah, what the fuck ever man. I’m going to find the history department. Those teachers were lit.”

You wandered through the halls, the teenagers around you getting increasingly violent.

“Hah! Found it.” You pushed open a door. Jackpot. All the coolest teachers were there, *and* they had wine. Dream logic was amazing.

“Oh hey, how’ve you been?” Asked Mr. Herbst. You loved Mr. Herbst. He was the fucking best.

“Just dandy, Mr. Herbst. How’re you and Mr. Delisle?”

“Oh, we’re well, thank you,” he said, smiling at you.

“That is great to hear, Mr. Herbst,” you told him. “And how’ve you been Mr. Leonard?”

“I’ve been doing fine. You’ll be glad to hear that the Speech and Debate Team lives on,” said Mr. Leonard.

“I am glad to hear that, Mr. Leonard.”

“Oh, how rude of me,” Mr. Herbst said, suddenly. “Come and sit down with us. Would you like some wine? We have a few bottles.”

“I *would* like some wine, thank you.”

“Red or white?”

“Red, please.”

He handed you a glass as Mr. Leonard started to tell you about his adventures as a Civil War reenactor.

Ms. Malzone walked in. Sweet, she wasn’t even a history teacher and

she decided to come to the history department. Now you chill with her, too.

Her torso twisted around 360 degrees. You sighed, disappointed. Mr. Herbt's eyes began to leak blood and Mr. Leonard collapsed, bones cracking and folding in on themselves.

You sipped your wine.

"You know," you told "Ms. Malzone." "I like red wine, but not as much as white wine."

She didn't respond coherently, she just let out an inhuman screech.

"I mainly drink red because it matches my aesthetic better."

She stumbled toward you, arms outstretched and nails sharp and deadly. The wine in your glass turned to blood and started to overflow from the glass, coating your hand and arm.

You took a sip of the blood.

"Ms. Malzone" stopped dead in her tracks.

"You... You're drinking human blood." She told you. She had Its

voice. "That's not wine anymore. It's been turned into blood."

"I know," you said. You took another sip of the blood.

"Ms. Malzone's" face morphed into Its face. It seemed very, very confused.

"Why are you continuing to drink human blood as though it were wine," It stated. It was a question, but it really sounded more like a statement.

You shrugged.

"Aesthetic."

5. Der Erlkönig

You were sure that It thought It was real funny. A real jokester. A real comedian. A funny guy.

Currently, your “brother” (quite clearly It) was clinging to you as you “rode” through the “woods” on “horseback” and telling you, in a terrified “voice,” that the “Erlkönig” (also quite clearly It; It wasn’t as good of an actor as It liked to believe) was out to “get” “him.”

You just *knew* that this was because you had been practicing Schubert’s “Erlkönig” lately. You wouldn’t be able to enjoy that song ever again, which was a real fucking shame because it was absolutely the best song to play on Halloween.

And of course, It couldn’t have sprung for the English translation. So now you were terrified because you knew how this song ends, it was dark, It was after you in a way that actually really would scare you, you were on a *fucking horse* , and you had to try and remember that German class you had taken years and years ago so you could sass a clown that wanted to kill you.

Life was fucking fantastic.

“Meine Schwester, Meine Schwester, und hörst du nicht, Was Elenkönig mir leise verspricht (1)?” It asked you, pretending to be your brother.

You struggled to come up with an answer that wasn’t what you were

actually supposed to say ‘cause, y’know, fight the man and all that. Kill the establishment. Sass the killer clown (German Remix).

You were suddenly hit with an idea.

“Mein Bruder, du weißt, dass ich kein einfach zu definierendes Geschlecht habe (2),” you told It rather smugly and in a state of a little bit of shock that you were able to say that in German. It was probably grammatically incorrect somehow, but small victories, right? “Aber du bist nicht mein Bruder. Mein Bruder würde das wissen und respektieren (3).”

Your “brother” glared at you.

And then began to melt.

Fuck. Oh no. Oh shit. Why do I keep challenging the clown. Why do I do that. It’s clearly a terrible idea.

Suddenly, the faint sounds of Something In The Woods turned into ghostly wailing. Then screaming and sobbing. It chilled you to the core, calling out to you, begging you to look back. You didn’t want to look back. You knew what you would see and you really would rather not.

You turned your head.

There It was, in the form of the Gentry, tall and thin and ghostly and stretching out through the entire forest, reaching out to you. Its hands were knobby and pale as the reached to grab you, the fingernails sharp and too long. A crown of bones sat upon Its hair which was thin and wispy and pale and Its face looked gaunt and dead. It was gigantic and Off and beautiful and absolutely the most terrifying thing you had ever seen and looked just like the Fair Folk of old and you had never been more scared in your entire life.

It could sense this. You could tell, because Its black mouth opened up and a cackle fell out of Its mouth from between the sharp teeth like the inky liquid that wriggled out from between Its gaping maw as well and landed on the forest floor, dripping closer and closer to your panicked horse.

Your heart thudded in fear and you felt yourself start to cry. You didn't know what to do. You were now playing both the father *and* the son. What did that mean? If you didn't ride fast enough, would It get you? Would you be safe if you made it back home, like the father? Or would it not matter, would you be dead by the time you got back to the homestead all the same, just like the boy?

“Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt; Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch ich Gewalt (4).”

You screamed as It grabbed your arm. It hurt so bad what the fuck you couldn't move It was burning into your skin, you called for help in as many different languages as you could think of, begging and crying out, you prayed to every deity, to the Gentry to come and destroy this fake, please, please don't let It take you, you knew what that line meant, why did it have to be *that line* .

There was a tug on your arm, you fell off your horse, and It stood over you, triumphant. It opened Its terrible mouth and

You woke up and sobbed for half an hour. You screamed and cried until your throat was raw and your face was puffy and red.

By the time you were done, you couldn't remember what you were crying about.

Notes for the Chapter:

(1) "My sister, my sister, and don't you hear/What the Alder-King promises me softly?" That one's actually grammatically correct because I pulled it straight from the poem. I only changed "my father" to "my sister."

(2) "My brother, you know that I don't have an easily defined gender." Or something like that. It doesn't really make grammatical sense, but whatever.

(3) "But you're not my brother. My brother would know and respect this." Again, the grammar's a bit iffy, but the reader hasn't had to speak German since sophomore year of high school, so it's not a big deal.

(4) "I love you, your beautiful shape tantalizes me;/ And if you are not willing, I'm going to use force." If you are not willing [to come with me]. Throughout the poem, the Erl-King has been tempting the boy to come with him into the forest and the boy, terrified, has begged his father to protect him. But the line is also fitting for this; wanting the reader, thinking It's entitled to them, and eventually taking them by force, if necessary.

6. We Must Not Look at Goblin Men

The bells were ringing and you were in a market.

“I fucking hate this,” you said aloud.

There were goddamn goblins. Your little brother was staring at them, fascinated, as they tempted him with strange fruits.

“Really?” You asked him. “Christina Rossetti? That’s kinda low-hanging fruit, don’t you think? You’re like, a literal goblin, so.”

Your brother stared up at you with reverent eyes.

You sighed. You knew it was a trap, but what could you do? You took his hand and stared to lead him away.

“We must not look at goblin men, we must not try their fruits: who knows upon what soil they fed their hungry, thirsty roots?” You told him.

He was silent, but looked longingly towards the market.

“You know, technically, that was *your* line,” you said. “And then *I* say, ‘You should not peep at goblin men.’ If you want to beat the shit out of me as a goblin, that is.”

He was still quiet as you pulled him forward, but continued to glance from the market up to you.

“My little brother hasn’t been shorter than me since my sophomore year of high school,” you said, turning to look forward. “Why do you keep invoking images of high school? It was a scary time for me, or something like that?”

He didn’t reply.

“Actually, why do you keep using my brother? Because you know I care about his well-being and I would willingly die for him? And poetry? Do you have a thing for poetry? Or do I just have a thing for poetry and you’re using that to scare me?”

For some reason, you felt the growing urge to cry.

“Why are you doing this?” You were suddenly exhausted. “What do you gain from doing this? Why can’t you just kill me and get it over with? Why *me* ?”

You could feel something building in your chest, rising and rising and rising till you could feel it in your chest, till you were barely keeping it hidden behind your teeth. Tears began to leak out of your eyes without your permission.

“Why can’t you leave me *alone* ?” You sobbed out. You couldn’t hold it in anymore. You were so goddamn *tired* and you wanted all of this to be done and you just wanted your life to go back to the way it used to be, without any clowns or any complications or worrying for your life and you just wanted to *sleep* without being so scared of what would happen in some fucking dreams that you would sit awake for hours and after having terrifying nightmares you would still wake up without feeling like you had slept at all and why weren’t you being allowed to *rest please god I need sleep please please please please* —

You became faintly aware of the fact that the goblins had ceased chanting “come buy, come buy.” You also became faintly aware of the fact that you were about to start dissociating. You turned to It. It was back as a clown, back as you first saw It. It had to be at least seven feet tall. It looked at you, unsmiling.

“You were right,” It told you. “I was the one who should have told you not to look at the goblin men.”

You looked at It, confused and tired and sick of mind games.

“Why?” You asked tiredly, just wanting to go home. Wanting this to be over with. “So you could beat me? Try to force me to eat poison? Nearly kill my brother?”

Now It grinned. “Oh-ho-ho! Could it be that our resident poet doesn’t remember how ‘Goblin Market’ ends? Doesn’t remember who I was playing?”

Your heart sunk. Of course you remembered how “Goblin Market”

ended, but It couldn't be serious, there was no way—

“She cried, ‘Laura,’ up in the garden, ‘Did you miss me? Come and kiss me,’” It said, grin growing wider and more manic as Its voice became wilder and out of control, breaking and fluctuating between high and low pitches. It stepped toward you, once, twice, a pause. Then continuing faster towards you, reciting the poem as you tried to walk backwards as fast as you could without taking your eyes off of It.

““Never mind my bruises, hug me, kiss me, suck my juices, squeezed from goblin fruits for you, goblin pulp and goblin dew.” No, no, this couldn't be happening, you needed to escape, to get out of here, you had to, you had to— you had to turn and run, that was your only option.

You turned and realized your mistake the second you took your eyes off the clown.

It grabbed you, claws digging and tearing through your clothes, through your skin where they touched. Its arms pulled you close and wrapped around you in a sick pantomime of a lover's embrace, Its chest to your back.

It brought Its mouth close to your ear and you could feel the over-large teeth brush against your cheek as It crooned out the end of the stanza.

““Eat me, drink me, love me, Laura, make much of me; for your sake I have braved the glen and had to do with goblin merchant men.””

You were genuinely scared this time. Your eyes, so recently dry, were leaking again and Its tongue stuck out to drink in the tears.

It turned you around in Its arms.

“You know, technically,” It told you, smirking, mimicking your voice mockingly, “those were *your* lines.”

The last thing you felt were Its teeth about to pierce the skin of your neck.

7. Gun

You were sitting in your tenth grade English class, nursing a Bloody Mary with your eleventh grade physics teacher. You somehow managed to be hungover in a dream and those fucking bells didn't help.

Your physics teacher began to twitch unnaturally.

You shot him 32 times with the automatic rifle you had under your desk.

"Fuck that," you told It. "I liked my physics teacher, but I'm not doing this bullshit tonight. Fuck you."

You stood up and walked away, sipping your Bloody Mary all the while.

8. Poetry and Pep Talks

“Will you, won’t you, will you, won’t you, will you join the dance?
Will you, won’t you, will you, won’t you, won’t you join the dance?”

“You realize,” you told It as It tried and failed to menace you with children’s poems, “that no matter what you do, no matter what voices you make, the Lobster Quadrille will never be scary.”

It glared, but fell silent.

“But for real though, what’s with all the poetry?” You asked. “I genuinely don’t know why you keep using it.”

It pouted and crossed Its arms, looking very much like a child throwing a tantrum.

“Seriously dude, I just want to know. Like, I like poetry and all, but I’m a science kid at heart, y’know? Space being the coolest fucking thing and all. If you tried scary space shit, I’m sure it would work. But right now, just trying various poems and hoping one sticks makes it seem like you’re running out of ideas.”

“You have been...” It trailed off, looking for the right word. “More difficult of a quarry than most other prey.”

“Oh. I thought I wasn’t prey, and I was supposed to be with you

‘cause destiny or some shit. But anyway, not the point. What’s all that got to do with poetry?”

It looked exasperated and just a tiny bit embarrassed.

“You... only really respond to... horror poems. It appears that otherwise, you are not scared of me.”

You blinked, surprised.

“Wait, are you telling me that I’ve only ever been scared of you when gothic poetry has been involved?”

It nodded stiffly.

“Oh, come on, I’m sure that’s not true. You’re plenty scary, even without the help of people like Poe.”

It fixed you with a look that made you think back on all the times you had been genuinely scared of It.

There was that one time— oh no, that had been because of... But what about— no that wasn’t... but surely— or no, maybe not...

“Okay, so *maybe* that’s true. But listen, you’re plenty scary my dude!

It's not that you lack originality or whatever." You gave It a lopsided grin.

It just continued to glare at you.

"Look," you sighed. "Don't be so hard on yourself! You really are scary! I just don't think I'm an accurate gauge for your abilities. I mean, come on. My mom taught English Lit for years. I grew up on gothic horror stories and the disturbing, so my threshold for fear is really high. One of my first memories is reading and then watching *Macbeth* with my mom. That play ends with the title character being beheaded. One of my earliest memories is watching the main character of a play's head being paraded around on a pike. In fifth grade, I was Edgar Allan Poe for Halloween. I had read all of the classic horror stories, like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, before I finished elementary school. So really, the only thing left to scare me is poetry! It's weird and wacky and threatening and oftentimes confusing and jumbled and hard for me to grasp because of the different format, and while I love all the rhythms and such, it's just a style of writing that's unfamiliar and difficult for me, so if you add that to creepy gothic horror that would ordinarily give me chills, you end up putting me in a turmoil and I'm confused and disoriented and scared. That's just the way it is. It's not a reflection of your abilities. You're really fucking scary, trust me. Give yourself some more credit. That thing you did with the baby arms after I beheaded you was inspired. And the most horrifying thing I've ever seen in my life. Like really, what the fuck."

It smiled softly. "You're just saying that."

"I'm really not. That was the worst thing that I have ever exposed my eyes to in my life, and I go to a different gendered bathroom every time I need to pee."

It grinned and all of Its teeth were revealed.

“I think,” you told It, “that you just have to wean me off gothic poems. Go for more narrative-style poems and then you can slowly make the shift to prose, like Flannery O’Connor or even short Poe stories. Once I become suitably afraid of stories told in a prose, typical, beginning-middle-end, narrative format, you can let your imagination run wild. The sky’ll be the limit. You’ll be the scariest goddamn thing to ever exist. I’ll be so terrified. Trust me on this. And look, I’m sorry for being such a tough nut to crack. I really don’t mean to step on your creative freedom. But think of it this way: the longer it takes to get me off pre-made horror, the more time you’ll have to think of something so horrible and awful that it’ll scare me shitless.”

“Thanks,” It said honestly.

“No problem,” you responded. Then you frowned. “Actually, never ask me to do that again. I can’t believe I had to give you a *pep talk* .”

9. Just a Regular, Run of the Mill Dream

You heard the bells and winced. Could you really not have any nights to your own dreams? You hated destiny.

That was when you realized that you were being carried.

Your eyes flew open. It that clown motherfucker thought you were going to go peacefully while It carried you to wherever-the-fuck, It had another thing coming—

You made eye contact with a stunning woman in a white dress who definitely was not a clown.

Wait a minute, you knew that stunning woman, it was—

“Michelle Gomez?” You asked, your mouth falling open in shock.

“Yes, my darling. Ms. Gomez and Dr. Gomez,” she told you, sighing happily. That was weird, you knew a ridiculous amount about Michelle Gomez, and there wasn’t a Dr. Gomez as far as you—

Wait.

Were you Dr. Gomez?

You glanced behind Michelle. There was a chapel. Michelle was wearing a white dress and carrying you. You were now Dr. Gomez for some reason. You did some mental math. The bells... were wedding bells?

“Oh thank fuck,” you cried, pulling yourself out of Michelle’s arms and standing to properly make out with her. She gasped in surprise, but you were just so happy that you couldn’t stop. It wasn’t some horrifying surrealist nightmare. There wasn’t a clown trying to eat you. It was just an ordinary, run of the mill, sex dream that started with you getting married to your favorite actress.

You pulled away from her and grabbed her shoulders.

“Baby,” you started, “I know that was random and a shock, but I’m just really, really happy and I need to get you home right now and give you a lot of orgasms, if that’s okay.”

Her eyes, which were about the size of dinner plates, slowly returned to their normal size and she grinned deviously.

“Lead the way,” she told you.

You grabbed her hand and began running in A Direction.

You stopped and turned to her.

“I don’t know where we live.”

She laughed and began tugging you in the opposite direction.

This was going to be the best night you’d had in months.

10. My Last Duchess

This was definitely one of *those* dreams, you could tell. Everything was in place just as it should be for It to show up and scare the bejesus outta you.

Which is why the fact that It hadn't shown up yet was really starting to worry you.

You were in a big mansion, wandering around aimlessly. It was completely empty. Not a single person in the whole place. You had passed through a few large, desolate rooms whose purpose you couldn't fathom. You were just about to call it quits and start screaming to alleviate the boredom when you came across a huge set of double doors.

"Sweet," you said to yourself and pushed them open to walk through.

You found yourself in a portrait gallery, just the kind that snobby rich people would have. All of the portraits seemed to be of It or some guy who sorta looked like a dead fish. There were a few other people, but no one of interest, really. You were seriously considering vandalising the place purely because there weren't really repercussions for it in this world, aside from being terrorized by a killer clown, which was honestly going to happen anyway, so might as well give it a shot.

Just when you began to really consider this, you came to a sight that figuratively took your breath away.

It was the largest painting in the gallery, and it was of *you* . It was absolutely stunning, capturing your likeness so well that it almost looked like... you were alive...

You could feel that you were in deep shit even before you felt the neck grasping your throat from behind.

It hoisted you high in the air, but made sure you could still see the painting.

“There’s my last duchess on the wall,” It said, “looking as if she were alive.” It sounded absolutely furious and the scariest part was that you couldn’t fathom *why* . What had you done to make It so angry with you?

“W-what...?” You asked, not quite being able to breathe.

“Will’t please you sit and look at her?”

What the fuck was going on?

“I said ‘Fra Pandolf’ by design, for never read strangers like you that pictured countenance, the depth and passion of its earnest glance, but to myself they turned (since none puts by the curtain I have drawn for you, but I) and seemed as they would ask me, if they durst, how such a glance came there; so, not the first are you to turn and ask thus.” It turned you around to face It and It looked absolutely murderous. Or, well, more so than usual.

What had brought this on? This was... this was “My Last Duchess.” This was about insane and unreasonable jealousy and murder and the rich just getting away with everything. So why...

“Sir, ’twas not her husband’s presence only, called that spot of joy into the Duchess’ cheek,” It ground out.

Oh shit. Last night you had a sex dream about someone who wasn’t a savage clown. But why the hell was It acting like this? It couldn’t think that— well, you knew that It thought you belonged to It because of destiny or some shit, and there was also that shit It pulled with “Goblin Market,” but “Sir, ’twas not her *husband’s* presence only?!” You weren’t— what the hell did this clown think was going on between the two of you?

More pressing of an issue, you really were running out of air and brain function, but you filed this away for a later date. And you would definitely revisit this at a later date.

“I-I can’t...”

It pulled you close, so close that you could feel Its breath on your face. You stared into yellow eyes, feeling very much like what you imagined a deer to feel like as it stared into headlights.

“You know the next part, don’t you?” It said, giggling without an ounce of mirth. “Shall I skip it? Shall I move on to *why* she is painted on the wall, *looking* as if she were alive?” Its voice was doing the

thing where it was truly wild, when It was truly angry, cracking and jumping. “Oh, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know...” It trailed off, muttering and cackling. Its eyes drifted in opposite directions.

You gasped for air. It held you in such a way that you wouldn’t pass out, but you weren’t getting nearly enough oxygen.

“You *know* WHY,” It suddenly shouted, jerking your body away from It as though you were poison. “You know, you know what she had. You know she had a heart— how shall I say?— Too soon made glad, too easily impressed; she liked whate’er she looked on, and her looks went *every* where.” It cackled wildly.

“Sir, ’twas all one!” It screamed. “ *My* favour at her breast, AND the dropping of the daylight in the West,” It gasped as a pause, breathing heavily, and brought you close again and deepened and lowered Its voice, “the bough of cherries some officious fool broke in the orchard for her, the white *mule* she rode with round the terrace—” here Its face turned into Michelle Gomez’s and began to rot. It was definitely mad about that. “All and each would draw from her alike the approving speech,” It paused and turned Its face back into Its own, licking a stripe up your reddening cheek, “or blush, at least.”

This was it. Pennywise the Goddamn Clown was going to kill you because you fucked your actress crush in a dream and apparently It cared about that. Specifically, It cared that it wasn’t *It* , which was news to you, though thinking back it really shouldn’t be.

“She thanked men—GOOD!” It shrieked suddenly, “But thanked somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked *my* gift of- of- of—” It gave a laugh, broken up between gasps and snorts and screams, as

though It had just heard the funniest thing in Its life. “Of a NINE-HUNDRED- YEARS-OLD NAME with *anybody’s* gift.”

It grasped your waist with the hand not suffocating you deceptively gently.

“Will you forgive me? I’m going to skip some more. But I need you to learn, you need to learn this- this is important, you need to learn, you need to learn.”

It winked at you and drooled as It breathed deeply.

“I know you’ll forgive me, you’ll let me be, you’ll forgive me, because you see, oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt, whene’er I passed her; but who passed without much the same smile?” It made a disappointed face, as though upset with Its imaginary duchess. Who you supposed was you. It *tsked* . “This grew; I gave commands; then all smiles stopped together.”

It raised Its hand from your waist to join the other around your throat. The threat was as obvious as it was in the original poem.

You are mine, or you are dead.

It turned you back around to face your portrait.

“There she stands as if alive.”

It dropped you unceremoniously on the floor.

You gasped, taking in huge gulps of air.

It looked down at you emotionlessly.

“Will’t please you rise? We’ll meet the company below, then.”

It walked away, and for once, you were the one left in a shocked silence.

11. Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came

Summary for the Chapter:

This is it. This is what I've been waiting to write since I started to write this story. I apologize, I think I'm funny. Pennywise doesn't actually show up in this one, no matter what you or the reader might think.

You blinked at the man. The man blinked back. Somewhere, bells tolled.

The man looked like he was going to say something, yet he also looked like he wasn't the type to say anything, so your initial impression was probably incorrect, and he probably would just remain silent.

"So," you said, as it was evident that the man wasn't going to say anything. "What's up?"

He didn't respond.

"Cool, cool," you said. "I don't know what you're trying to pull this time, but I don't recognize it. Wild, right? And you think I know every poem to exist."

The man still didn't respond.

"No, no, give me a minute. I'll get it in a second."

You looked around at your surroundings, then at the man. You were drawing a blank. You didn't really recognize anything. Just what was it trying to pull here?

You suddenly realized something.

"Are you serious?" You asked. "Are you fucking kidding me?"

The man said nothing.

"Who the hell would recognize this?" You said. "You're lucky I had parents in academia. This poem is just so utterly obscure. I mean even, 'My Last Duchess' was a bit of a stretch because Browning is less well known. Speaking of, I still want to kick your ass for that. But this? Browning's scribbles to cure writer's block? I didn't even like this one. If you want to scare me, you're going to have to try a lot harder."

The man still said nothing, but you could tell he was weirded out. Not through any expression on his face, he was really good at keeping a straight face. But somehow, even with your stunted social skills, you could tell he was very confused by your existence. Or pretending to be, at least.

"Oh, don't look at me like that, you dickwad. Or should I say *Childe Roland* ." You scoffed and looked away, missing how the man's fingers twitched toward the guns around his hips.

“Why do you know me?” The man asked.

“Oh, drop the act. Turn back into your original form or whatever so I can fight you without feeling bad for some guy you think looks like Roland.”

“... I am Roland,” he said. Again, even though he showed nothing, you could tell that he was bewildered.

“Oh, of course you are. And I’m sure you’re on your way to The Dark Tower, too.”

The man with the guns who was supposedly Roland stared blankly at you.

There was a silence.

“Well,” you said to him, “if it makes you feel any better, your acting has gotten a *lot* better. Gone are the days of mediocre little brothers. You’re really managing to capture the ‘what the fuck who are you do I have to kill you’ that I would expect from him. But you’re not really moving away from my dependency on poetry. There’s not enough action here. Nothing jumbled and scary.”

The man remained silent.

“You know what you should try? You should try opera. I love opera. My favorite is Don Giovanni.” You made a face. “Though maybe don’t do that one. You sexually harass me enough without needing to do so in Italian.”

The silence remained, and it remained awkward.

“K, Imma leave now. Think about opera, though. There’s a whole bunch of great ideas in opera. But if you ruin Samuel Ramey for me, I’m going to skin you.” You gave a peace sign. “See ya.”

You walked away.

The man stared after you before pragmatically deciding it wasn't worth it and he moved on with his life.